

GERD Endotherapy

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Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a major U.S. health problem affecting roughly 19 million Americans. GERD is caused by stomach acid traveling backward into the esophagus. Unlike the stomach, the esophagus is not well protected from acid and may become damaged from acid exposure. The most common symptoms of GERD are heartburn (chest pain) and regurgitation of stomach acid or sour taste.

What causes GERD?

There is a sphincter, or valve, where the esophagus meets the stomach called the lower esophageal sphincter or LES. It normally opens only to let food and drink enter the stomach. In people with GERD, the LES opens at other times, allowing stomach acid to reach the esophagus. Why this happens with some people and not others is unknown.

How is GERD treated?

There are three major treatment approaches: drugs, surgery and endoscopic therapy. Drugs lower the production of stomach acid, but some people are concerned about the cost, inconvenience and effects of daily drug use. Surgery involves wrapping part of the stomach around the LES to make it less likely to open when it's not supposed to. However, any surgery carries significant risk and recovery takes days to weeks.

What is endotherapy?

The third option is endotherapy, which consists of relatively new and efficient procedures to treat GERD. The doctor uses a long, thin and flexible tube called an endoscope to examine and repair the esophagus through the mouth. Some advantages of endotherapy are: less trauma than surgery; shorter outpatient procedure and recovery times than surgery; general anesthesia is not required; and the need for heartburn medication is eliminated or reduced.

There are three types of endotherapy—suturing, radiofrequency energy and injection—all of which aim to strengthen the LES and reduce acid reflux.

Suturing

In the EndoCinch procedure, the doctor uses a modified endoscope to make stitches near the LES and then tie them together. While many patients had improved heartburn symptoms, this approach is technically more difficult to perform than other endotherapy procedures.

Radiofrequency

The Stretta procedure delivers mild radiofrequency energy through small electrodes to heat the LES area and causes the tissue to shrink and tighten. Although there are reports of improved symptoms and reduced medication, there is some concern over interpretation of study results.

Injection

In the Enteryx procedure, a liquid chemical mixture is injected near the LES. The material quickly solidifies to become a permanent implant that leads to improved LES function.

Many patients report reduced medication use and improved symptoms. Enteryx was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration through a more

rigorous process than other GERD endotherapies.

Which endotherapy is best for me?

There are few long-term results or rigorous, placebo-controlled studies (underway for all endotherapies). Not all patients will benefit from an endotherapy. Some serious side effects were seen in clinical practice that were not reported in clinical trials. Due to differences in study designs, it is difficult to directly compare one endotherapy to another.

If you are thinking about an alternative to daily drug use or surgery to control your GERD symptoms, it's important to discuss endotherapy options with your doctor.

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